"Who are you?" plead legendary rock group, The Who, as an axe cleaves into a mannequin's head. Another episode of the popular television series, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000), which places the search for identity as its primary goal, projects itself into lounge rooms across the nation, indeed, across the globe. *CSI* has become so popular it has given birth to a family of siblings and syndication re-releases: *CSI*; *CSI: Miami*; *CSI: NY*; even, *CSI: Weekends* (The Internet Movie Database 2006). One wonders will there be a *CSI: Monday*, *CSI: Tuesday* – a *CSI* for each and every day of the week. But these programs are not alone and are certainly not new. Axe-wielding, knife-thrusting, chainsaw-toting killers have been splattering blood, or chocolate syrup at least, onto our screens and down bathroom drains long before audiences were exposed to the blue light so integral a tool in Gil Grissom's quest. But the need to know "who are you" is not, perhaps, as potent as the need to know "who am I". Is the popularity of such gruesome investigations into "who are you" so much due to our desire to know "whodunit" or more to do with our need to know who we are and how we fit into this world so fraught with danger, whether real or imagined, and uncertainty? One text which blatantly and violently weds identity and the acts of an incredulously adept chainsaw-toting and nailgun-packing serial killer is Mary Harron's film, an adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis's novel, *American Psycho* (2000). While some critics, including Grant (1999), Cooper (2000), Baelo Allue (2002) and Robinson (2006), have compared this film to such classic 'slasher flicks' as Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) or Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994), Kilbourn (2005), though certainly acknowledging that Harron's anti-hero, Patrick Bateman (Christian Bale), is "a Norman Bates for the later twentieth century", likens this "postmodern monster myth" with the father of all contemporary monster myths, Shelley's early nineteenth century *Frankenstein* (1818). Cottom (cited in Kilbourn 2005), referring to that Promethean construction of male body parts, claims that "in seeking to represent himself, man makes himself a monster", and this is indeed the case with Bateman, who, in seeking his own identity, finds his sanity slipping away, his identity lost in his desperation to claim it. Rather than building himself, creating either man or monster, he peels away what is real, only to find he simply is not there.

From beginning to end, from robotic waiters in an exclusive restaurant mechanically reciting their 'specials-of-the-day', to the final scene where Bateman is unable to convince his own lawyer that he is who he claims to be and has perpetrated the violence he stridently avers to having committed, *American Psycho* explores that question posed by The Who. But in this case, unlike those examined by the forensic investigators in television's Miami, New York or Las Vegas, there may not have actually been a crime committed or blood spilt upon which to shine that light or daub that luminol. In this case, the vividly violent acts of a corporate charadist are as unreal or as fake as the "herb mint facial masque", which Bateman applies to himself as part of his daily routine – a routine which prepares him to face a world so consumed by consumerism, that it is consumption itself revolving not on a medial axis but rather on a platinum Amex card or an embossed business card. These are the things which in this world maketh the man, and it is a man's world, a patriarchy wherein even matrimony must take a back seat to the office agenda and the demands of male bonding and one-up-manship. The chainsaw in this text is not fuelled by petroleum. It is fuelled by testosterone. This film, rather than a tale akin to Jerry Bruckheimer's television productions, is an exposé of a façade, "an ultimate portrayal", as Kooijman and Laine (2003) claim, "of the 1980s New York yuppie lifestyle, depicting a world dominated by hedonism, greed, and egocentrism". In this world, nothing is really what it seems. Friendships are shallow; appearances are far more important than any truth or honesty which may or may not lie beneath the beautifully lathered, lotioned and tanned skin, that skin itself hidden beneath expensive Valentino suits and Oliver Peoples glasses.

This superficiality, this belief that what is inside does not matter, that only appearances are important, is a condition, a product, of a culture that projects itself to the world as an embossed business card of goodness and righteousness, despite its own internal conflicts, its internal strife borne of racism and a growing division between rich and poor. Perhaps the barrier that exists to prevent Bateman's lawyer believing he could indeed be a blood-lusting serial killer is that same barrier that divides the United States of America by both race and class, a barrier built not from bricks and mortar, but rather from a heritage of division - a heritage built on a foundation of violence which has formed the building blocks of that nation "ever since the first European settlers began to wrest the land away from natives" (Grant 1999, p. 24). As Grant (1999, p. 27) points out, it would be unlikely that Bateman's victims would enter "a deserted alley with a man they just met", but an apartment in an exclusive part of the city is another matter. It must be safe because it symbolises wealth and achievement. In Bateman's up-market world, however, it merely means his tools of murder are shinier, newer, and more expensive. It is as though Bateman could not possibly be a serial killer – he has the business card to prove it. Even when he says he is into "murders and executions", what is heard by *his* audience is "mergers and acquisitions". When he tells arch-rival, and soon to be victim, Paul Allen (Jared Leto), "I like to dissect girls. Did you know I'm utterly insane?", Allen's response is: "Great tan, Marcus. Really impressive. Where do you tan?" Allen is not only unable to recognise a serial killer when he sees one, but also unable to even tell the difference between one work colleague and another. But this is of little consequence to Bateman now – the die has been cast, the newspapers have been taped to the floor, Allen's fate, in Bateman's mind, is a *fait accompli*. An obsession with wealth and consumption may have blurred Allen's vision, but it has clouded Bateman's mind. This obsession is something the United States of America, as self-proclaimed 'leader-of-the-world', is frighteningly proud of. One could not imagine this 'land of hope and glory' boasting, as Baelo Allue (2002) claims, to be home to "74 percent of the world's serial killers". Seltzer (cited in Baelo Allue 2002) argues that "serial killing takes place in a culture where violence has become a collective spectacle". When one considers a culture that has produced so many *CSI*'s, *SVU*'s, *Lethal Weapon*'s and *Die Hard*'s, one surely is considering a culture that has not only spectacularised violence, it has done so with a vehemence and determination little short of a 'desert storm'. It is this culture, this world leader, according to Seltzer (cited in Baelo Allue 2002), that actually created and defined the term 'serial killer', which is not surprising, given that, as Baelo Allue (2002) states, "Under capitalism, seriality has become a principle of production". Victims are merely products to be consumed. In Bateman's world, this consumption must be done with style - politely, tastefully, with an appropriate backing track, just like the "white, probably heterosexual, intelligent...gentleman", Hannibal Lecter, who "used to eat his victims with aromatic herbs" and a bottle of fine wine (Baelo Allue 2002).

The presentation of violence as an appetiser is craftily introduced in the opening titles sequence of *American Psycho*. Globules of red liquid drop through the cinematic frame to the hauntingly staccato plucking of a violin. The drops splatter over the film's title. A knife blade becomes erectile behind Christian Bale's credit, and then slams with a decisive thud into a slab of roasted flesh. But this is not a slice from the cannibalistic menu of an exotic Lecter dining experience. It is soon revealed that this has been the preparation of an exquisitely delicate "rare-roasted partridge breast in raspberry coulis with a sorrel timbale" to be served in an equally exquisite and exclusive restaurant. This delicious deception, this "fusion of consumption and bloodshed" is a constant thread throughout the film and "points", according to Robinson (2006), "to the connection between consumption and barbarity", between chocolate syrup and bloodshed. Though for Hitchcock, choosing to use chocolate syrup as a substitute for blood in that classic shower scene, may have been more for technical and visual purposes than symbolic or semiotic,

and admittedly filming in black and white aided his deception, there are certainly comparisons that can be made between his film adaptation of a Robert Bloch novel and *American Psycho*, as both Robinson (2006) and Grant (1999) would propose. Robinson (2006) compares Harron's Bateman to Hitchcock's Bates, arguing that Harron has provided "an abysmal modern equivalent: a man whose consumer lust is transformed into blood lust". By doing so, Harron, as Robinson (2006) suggests, has provided a link between the consumer ideals of the modern world and the barbarity of a time one might have thought had long passed, or at least might not be expected to exist within the glass and steel towers of Wall Street. But then, perhaps the overt and excessive consumption so much a characteristic of the Reagan era, that boisterous economic boom of the eighties, was in and of itself the barbarism of a not-so-New World Order, not quite what Ronald and his Vice President, not of Mergers and Acquisitions, but of the Nation, George Bush, would have preferred to espouse. The intertextuality linking Harron's text with that of Hitchcock's does go deeper than titles, or even the similarity of the surnames of each film's psychotic protagonist. Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) also had a problem with defining who he was, releasing his inner self as did Dr. Jekyll, only in his case with a *Mrs*. Hyde. Though referring to Ellis's book, rather than Harron's cinematic adaptation, Grant (1999, p. 28), in his paper, "American Psycho/sis", published a year prior to the film's release, writes of "the horror of the normal" established by Hitchcock with his settings of "contemporary motel rooms, family homes" and, as if one could forget, shower cubicles. Courtesy of Hitchcock, no longer would horrific or barbaric acts be confined to dark alleyways or dilapidated, deserted, even haunted houses of more Gothic tales. Horror could now occur in normal, everyday environs. It could now occur on the eleventh floor of the American Garden buildings on West Eighty-First Street. But the horror in these exclusive enclaves of civility and pretentiousness is not the horror of a knife-blade slashing at innocence through a shower curtain. The horror of Bateman's world is the horror of anonymity; the horror he feels as he realises he, Patrick Bateman, his identity, his individuality, simply does not exist. As he performs his morning routine, washing with particular lotions and gels, applying and then peeling away a face masque, he looks in the mirror and says, in voice-over:

> There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction. But there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory. Although I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours, and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable--I simply am not there.

Throughout the film, Bateman is constantly attracted to the reflection of his own image, whether it is in the glass of a framed poster, the bathroom mirror, a bedroom mirror, a building window, or even the reflective surface of a metallic restaurant menu. Kooijman and Laine (2003) argue that "Bateman needs the reflections of his own image as a confirmation of his existence, his Self", but, unfortunately, his Self is not his own. His Self is a product, just as are the jars of skin cleansers and exfoliants that line the shelves of his vanity cabinet, and quite likely also line the shelves of the vanity cabinets of his colleagues. They all sport the same look, the same hairstyles, the same suits, the same pretentious attitudes. This sameness is so intense that they all often mistake people they see in restaurants for people they would hope to see or perhaps, hope to be seen with, or at least, hope to be seen dining with in the same establishment. This sameness is so intense that even in the workplace, identities are mistaken. They all sport an air of self-importance, arrogance, a vacuity. It *is* a sport, this need they all have, to claim their place in this corporate arena. But rather than playing with bats and balls, these contestants vie for victory with business cards and restaurant reservations. Though acquiring a particular account or business achievement might seem the goal of any 'Vice President of Mergers and Acquisitions', these elite executives place more value, not on that managerial title, but on its presentation on their cards. An even greater glory is one's ability to score a reservation at the exclusive Dorsia restaurant, a goal it seems can only be attained by Paul Allen. Allen's prowess in this department does not attract Bateman's respect or admiration. It attracts his loathing and ultimately, the blade of his shining axe. Fortunately for Allen, however, Bateman's axe is not real. To paraphrase Bateman's concept of his own existence: 'There is an idea of an axe, some kind of weapon. But there is no real axe, only a fantasy, something imagined. It simply is not there'. The reality of Bateman's fantastic imagination becomes apparent as his exploits become more implausible. His seemingly casual adroitness at dropping a chainsaw down a stairwell to impale the escaping Christy (Cara Seymour); the power of his pistol to cause two police cars to explode (an event that perplexes even Bateman himself) – these scenes, as excessive as any actions meted out by Willis's John McLane in *Die Hard* (1988) or Schwarzenegger's Harrier jet expertise in *True Lies* (1994), clearly suggest, as Kooijman and Laine (2003) argue, that the events, indeed, the entire story, take place "in the universe of Bateman's cinematic fiction". Bateman is not a tough and rebellious New York cop doing battle with a ruthless terrorist-cum-thief, nor is he an experienced, tango-dancing covert agent for some secret government agency. The audience is not watching a melodramatic action movie in a suburban cinema. It is watching a film that is screening inside the mind of a man "desperately trying to retain meaning into his life" (Kooijman & Laine 2003). Cronenberg (cited in Kauffman 2000/2001) argues that Bateman, by creating this world of violence in his own mind, has realised the world outside, the business cards, the suits, the money, the look, "is all meaningless and artificial". His only way to survive this devastating realisation is to break away from the niceties and superficial politeness by diving into the depths of depravity and barbarity, though it is still appropriate, apparently, to do so, as would the honourable Lecter, with a fine Chianti. This notion of Bateman's reality as cinema of the mind is further conveyed by the use of video within the film. Often, a video plays a significant role in the film's *mise-en-scène*, whether it be as a pornographic backdrop to a telephone conversation arranging a dinner engagement, or an agonising soundtrack to an exercise routine. Even Bateman's sexual proclivities, going beyond a mere *ménage à trois*, include a video camera as a potent member of the event. "Video...", claims Grant (1999), "is...graphic proof of our postmodern fragmentation...video is the theater where identity...inevitably becomes performance". Bateman is the writer, director and star in his own 'blockbuster'. Cooper (2000), in his review of *American Psycho*, perhaps aptly titled "Committed", suggests there is an unease, "the feel of a personality disorder" conveyed by the cinematography of this text, "as if Harron has infused Bateman's narcissism into the texture of the film". Indeed, Bateman is the film. Bateman is the camera and the projector. Bateman has an idea of Bateman, but Bateman simply is not there. His confession means nothing, for there is nothing to confess. Who are you? You are a figment of your own imagination. You are the cinema of your own mind. You are "an idea of a Patrick Bateman". But you simply are not there.

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